51:Chen and Coe E-5 (1953)1954 AD1 Formosa
Formosan Aborigines AD4

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The other part of the *mi?ʃao* divinatory instrument is called *tsohak*. This is a piece of hardwood about 18cm in length. It is held under one foot of the diviner when in use. The end held under the foot is often somewhat thinner than the other end. The other end is about 4cm thick and has two or three grooves transversely carved on one side. These grooves are called *ŋakto*.

During divination, the *tsohak* is placed on the ground with the grooved side facing downward. The end without grooves is held under one foot of the diviner. The central portion of the inner face of the *ʃao* is breathed upon and smeared with ashes before it is used. Then, with the end with the mane-like fibres in his left hand, and with the end with the bamboo-joint in his right hand, the diviner saws the *ʃao* in the *ŋakto* of the *tsohak*. The *ʃao* will be severed by this heavy sawing, and the result of the divination can be read from the shape of the severed end of the part without the bamboo-joint, with the bamboo exterior facing the diviner.

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By comparative study, Utsurikawa found that *mi?ʃao* divination has affinities in southeast Asia, particularly with the Kenyah and the Kayan of Borneo and with the Nagas of Assam. He therefore considered this technique as an Indonesian culture trait.

Priesthood

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Among the Tavarong Ami, priests were called *kakita:n*. The office of *kakita:n* was hereditary: succession was by primogeniture through the female line. Formerly there were five or six *kakita:n* families in Tavarong, but only one, that of the late Saumah-Kuriu, remains in existence today, and will be described later. The cause of the decrease in *kikita:n* families was, according to one informant, due to the prohibition placed on native rituals by the Japanese authorities. The priestly families consequently declined because they had lost their function. The Saumah-Kuriu family retained its standing as it owned a ceremonial house with carved wooden posts; this house was designated an historical monument in 1935 by the Japanese colonial administration.

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This same ceremonial house was reported by Utsurikawa (1936) and Tsijiiwa (1944). The present house keeps its original form today although it has been rebuilt in recent years and now is only one half the size of the original house described by the above two authors. Its present plan and a side-view are shown in the accompanying illustration (Figure 1). According to Utsurikawa, the original house was abandoned in May 1930 on the death of the family head Saumah-Kuriu, a decision reached at that time by the family members on account of frequent misfortune. The house itself is unique: it is the only one in the entire Ami area having carved wooden posts. The designs on these posts are human and animal figures, curved lines, and sawtooth patterns. The geometrical designs are always symmetrical in arrangement. In the changing culture of the Ami, a new type of house has been adopted by the tribesmen. This ceremonial house remains as the only surviving example of their original type of dwelling.

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